

Robert's Rally Round-up

TOUR OF SPERRINS; BEST ROUND YET

With a massive entry of 110 cars, the Tour of the Sperrins Rally held over closed roads last month, turned out to be the best round so far of the 2010 NI Championship.

The Magherafelt MC organised event consisted of three 8- mile stages in the Sperrin Mountains, not far from Draperstown, which were variations of tests used before on the Circuit and Ulster. Each stage was used twice while a central service park and the start/finish of the rally was in Maghera.

For our part we, that is Goff, Steven, Tony (new recruit) John, Anna and I were timing the third stage in the loop. Known as "Stone Circles" the test ran past Davagh Forest which had been the sole venue for this event last year.

The weather was so good that Tony and I were able to sit out on a hill and time the cars over the finish line. From our vantage point we could see the final hairpin on the stage and witness the various efforts used to negotiate same. Another new member, Ross was acting as a marshal at our location.

Unsurprisingly, pre event favourite and last year's winner Derek McGarrity and co-driver, James McKee won the event, but it was far from plain sailing for the current NI Champ!

Sean Devine and Robert McDaid hadn't been seen much since their third place on last June's Donegal Rally, due to a combination of lack of funds and a shoulder injury which Sean picked up following a fall from a roof. So it was a big surprise when they placed a very late entry here and ran second on the road to Derek with number 118 on the door.

Right from the start McGarrity had set-up problems with his newly acquired ex-Bolan Subaru S12C and so Devine hit the front in his older S11 WRC.

Going into the final stage, Stone Circles 2, Derek was 13 seconds behind Sean but he stormed the 8 miles to record a time on our clock 16 seconds faster than the Donemana builder, and so take victory by 2.9 seconds.

In third place was Derek McGeehan with Eugene Donnelly co-driving the Corolla WRC, while another local driver, Camillus Bradley, was best of the 2-wheel drive competitors, in fourth, with his Escort Mk.2

Altogether 84 cars finished that final stage, with Stuart Biggerstaff in the S9 finishing just outside the top ten to remain 6 points behind McGarrity at the head of the NI Championship, although I now understand that Derek will NOT be taking part in any more rounds, as he wants to concentrate on the Irish National series.

George Robinson is third in the Championship and Raymond Johnston is fourth. George usually stays on the tarmac with his P2000 Subaru, so I only expect Stuart and Raymond to go into the woods after the Mourne Rally this weekend, therefore the battle for this year's title should be between them.

PATTERSON IS SO HOT IN LOUGHGALL

On what was the hottest day of the year so far, Lisburn driver Wesley Patterson, back from a forced six-month lay off, completely controlled and dominated the recent Loughgall Country Park Rally.

Organised by North Armagh Motor Club, the six stage event took place over the usual tarmac paths in the picturesque Co.Armagh Country Park. Though the stages were short in length, each being around 3 miles, they were pretty daunting, fast and challenging, as car number 20 discovered on stage one when he crashed into a fence on our corner and was very lucky that the THREE stout posts which entered the car did not hit either crew!

I should explain that Victor and I were covering Radio on the day, and for once actually got to see a bit of action.

This event has been running now for some years and is of course only open to two-wheel drive rally cars. A total of 89 started and most of the top twenty were Mk.2 Escorts, of which Wesley's was a powerful 2.5 litre example.

Unfortunately the number two seed and former winner, Camillus Bradley was a non starter, so it was left to Adrian Hetherington and Mervyn Wedlock to provide the main opposition to Patterson, winner here last year.

Wedlock led after the first stage, by one second, but then Wesley took over at the top of the time sheets and was never headed. In the end Mervyn was second and Circuit National Rally winner, John Waring, took third just 2.7 seconds ahead of Hetherington. The battle for fifth place raged all day between Martin Teggart and Michael Conlon and going into the final test they were level on time but Teggart took the place by seven tenths of a second despite a wild moment near the end of the stage. Seventy six cars made it to the finish of the last stage on what was a great event and well supported by a large turn out of spectators due no doubt to the fantastic weather and slick organisation.

JONATHAN COEY

It is with great sadness that I have to report the passing of a former BMMC/BRMC member. Jonathan Coey, a neighbour of mine, passed away at his home on Sunday 16th May after a long illness. He was only 37 and should have had a long life ahead of him. Jonathan, who went to school with Scott, was a club member in the mid to late eighties and accompanied me on many events back then. He lost his father Brian just two years ago. My thoughts at this time, and I am sure those of all of you who knew him, go to his mother Ruby and sisters Donna and Leanne.

Rally Diary

SAT. 5TH JUNE MODERN TYRE SERVICE MOURNE RALLY

The fifth round of the NI Championship uses three tarmac stages in Counties Armagh and Down. We are timekeeping as usual. Top of the 120 car entry is Darren Gass in a WRC Subaru while George Robinson and Raymond Johnston continue their battle for the Championship, now that McGarrity has left the building! Stuart Biggerstaff continues his pace notes learning curve in the S9 and is seeded at 18.

FRI. 18-SUN. 20TH JUNE TOPAZ DONEGAL INTERNATIONAL RALLY

Donegal in June is the place to be. This is round four of the Irish Tarmac Championship and features such talents as last year's winner Gareth MacHale, Tim McNulty, Derrek McGarrity, star of the Circuit Alastair Fisher and lots more besides. Always a cracking event, we are due to time Malin Head on Friday, Fanad Head on Saturday and then Atlantic Drive on Sunday.

SAT. 3RD JULY LOUGHGALL FESTIVAL OF MOTORSPORT

Back to Loughgall Country Park again. This time for the Festival of Motorsport which includes the eight stage Historic Rally Car Challenge. We will be helping with timekeeping and other marshalling duties on this North Armagh MC organised event.

TUES. 13TH JULY BISHOPSCOURT CLUBMAN RALLY

Ballynahinch MC have asked us to provide timekeepers for this one as usual. More next month.

SAT. 31ST JULY ORCHARD MOTORSPORT LURGAN PARK RALLY

This will be the 30th anniversary of the popular North Armagh MC event. New this year will be a Metro 6R4 Challenge which could feature up to 10 of these iconic Group B "Noisy little monsters". Expect to see Denis Biggerstaff wheel out his legendary machine. More news next month.